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The Big Shift: Navigating The New Stage Beyond Midlife



Synopsis

Marc Freedman, hailed by the New York Times as "the voice of aging baby boomers [seeking] meaningful and sustaining work later in life," offers a recipe for how we can transform America's coming midlife crisis into a midlife opportunity. Millions of people in their fifties, sixties, and seventies are searching for answers to the question "What's next?" and are navigating their way to an entirely new stage of life and work, one that could last as long as midlife. Shifting to a much longer lifespan isn't as easy as it may seem. Unlike the transition from adolescence to adulthood, managing this process for many is a do-it-yourself project. Drawing on powerful personal stories, *The Big Shift* provides not only direction but a vision of what it would take to help millions find their footing in a new map of life.

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Customer Reviews

My lawyer wife, preparing to retire fairly young from a successful career in government service, was casting about for ideas on what to do next. Based on a review of Marc Freedman's *The Big Shift* that I read in the WSJ, I hopped on [Amazon](#), read the glowing reviews, and bought it for her, figuring it would contain some helpful guidance to direct her toward new activities that would make her retirement interesting and meaningful. My wife was excited when I told her about the reviews and promptly started to read *The Big Shift* when it arrived. As she got a few chapters in, I noticed that she was sort of grimacing as she read. I asked about it and she said, "This just isn't useful at all. It's as if the author simply interviewed a bunch of people, read a bunch of articles, categorized it all into chapters, and then printed it out as a book." After a while, she put it down and said, "Thanks,

sweetie, but this is just not worth my time."That was a couple of weeks ago. I just picked the book up and read it through, and I have to agree with her assessment. Perhaps *The Big Shift* would be useful for some people, but I just don't see any of Freedman's ideas as particularly visionary: Wow, many people start fulfilling second careers in midlife. Having heard the "terza edad" concept in Latin America and Europe since I was a teen in the early '80s, I'm not that blown-away to see that someone's finally translated it into English. Other than rehashing that, there is nothing here but smug, uninspiring and banal anecdotes (neverending, all along the lines of "I was an overworked executive who gave it all up, hit bottom, and found joy teaching benighted minority youth").

"Are we being good ancestors?" --Jonas Salk, quoted in *The Big Shift*In *The Big Shift* author Marc Freedman answers questions that concern all of us who want to age well. How do we become "elders" -- that is, wisdom bearers -- rather than regress into a second childhood? How do we avoid being an economic drain on society, without competing with the young for jobs? How do we stay involved in our communities and leave a positive imprint on the world, even as we face being marginalized because of age-ism?In answering these questions, Freedman argues that accepted ideas about aging no longer hold true. People are living longer, having families later in life, and facing more financial uncertainty. The era of necessarily retiring in one's sixties to a life of golf and bridge is over. And according to Freedman, that's a good thing, because many people come into their highest creative energy and deepest intelligence during their 50s, 60s, and 70s. Freedman calls these years the Encore Stage - the phase that opens up between the middle years and late life, and he believes society has much to gain by harnessing the talent, wisdom, and experience of people who have lived long and learned.Based on interviews with older people who have re-made their lives to better fit their interests and values, Freedman offers us examples of people who are "engaged in work that moves them beyond narrow personal concerns to concern for others." These are people committed to "giving back" and "giving forward" to their communities. His re-telling of their stories inspires and teaches, and as I read them I realized that many of my assumptions about aging were false.

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